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“The Nation's Prayer”

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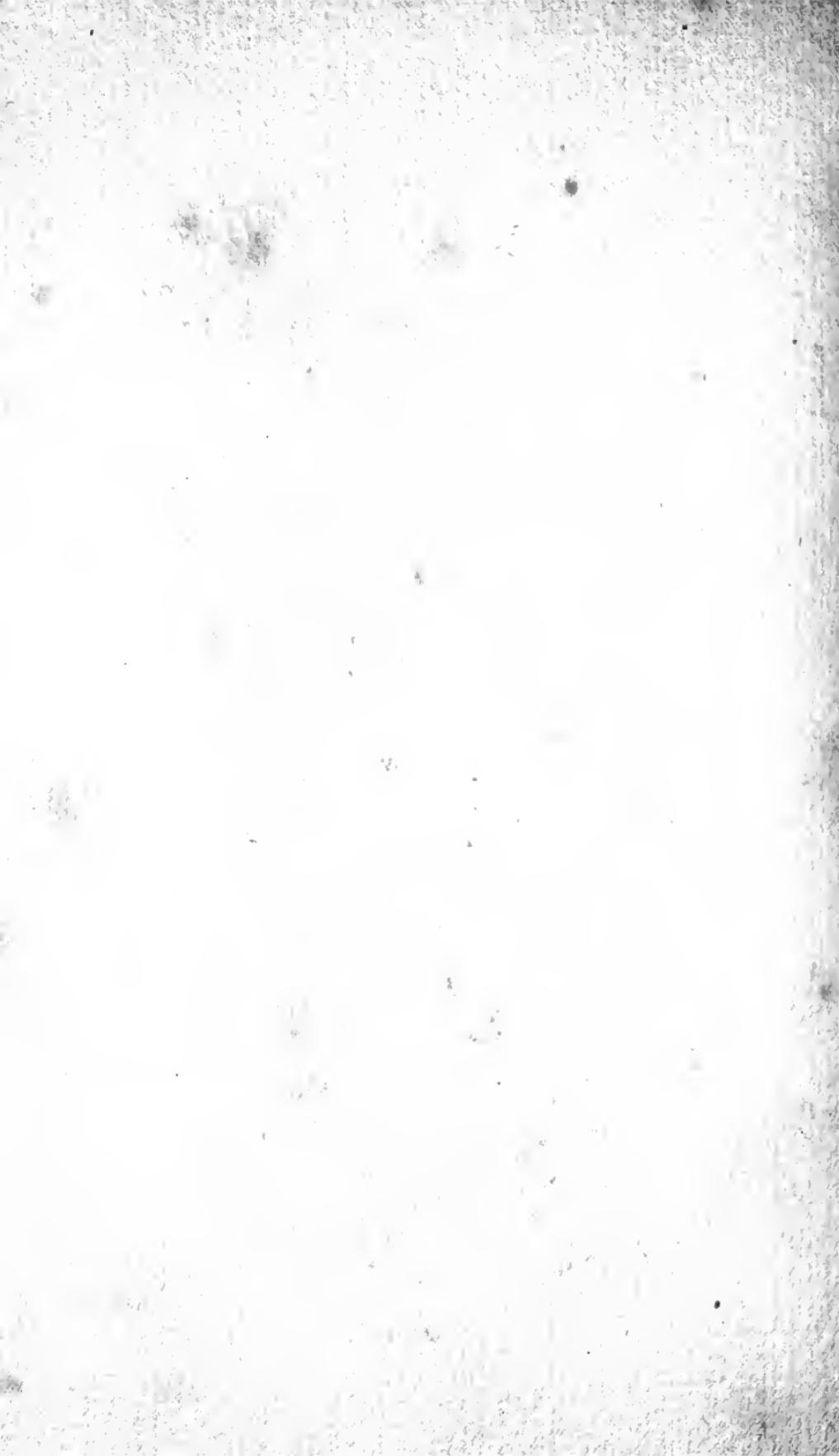
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The Nation's Prayer.

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The Nation's Prayer.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

ST. JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE,

ON

SABBATH, JUNE 28TH, 5662-1902,

BY

HERMANN ADLER, PH.D., LL.D.,

*Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of
the British Empire.*

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

Prayer for the Recovery of HIS MAJESTY KING EDWARD, and also on behalf of the QUEEN and of all the ROYAL FAMILY.

PSALM ciii., PSALM cxxx., PSALM cxxxix.

PRAYER.

O Lord, Healer of all flesh! We beseech Thee, have mercy upon Thy Servant, King Edward, and in Thy grace support him upon the bed of sickness. Assuage his pain. Vouchsafe wisdom unto his physicians, that they may cure his wound, and that his health spring forth speedily. Renew his strength as the eagle's. Prolong his days, that he may rule this realm in righteousness and with majesty.

Thou, O Lord, art our refuge in times of trouble. Sustain our gracious Queen Alexandra and all the members of the Royal House in this season of sore distress. Turn their sorrow into rejoicing. Gird them with gladness, so that though weeping may endure for a night, joy may come in the morning.

Withdraw not, we beseech Thee, Thy loving-kindness from our country. Shield the indwellers thereof. Deliver our souls from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling. Be merciful unto us, O God, and bless us: and cause Thy face to shine upon us. Amen.

יהי הפלך :

GOD SAVE THE KING!

II. KINGS, xi. 12.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

I had fixed upon these words as the text of the Coronation sermon I had hoped to preach this morning. They form the keynote of the discourse I now propose delivering. And it is in full accord with the teachings of our faith, that they are the first words pronounced on this pulpit, which I herewith dedicate to the sacred purpose that it will henceforth serve.

But these words, which were intended to be the jubilant expression of our homage and

rejoicing, become to-day the passionate cry of the nation's o'erfraught heart. God Save the King! May the King live! May the King live, and not die! Heal him, O Lord, and he will be healed. Save him and he will be saved, for Thou art our praise.

We have always loved our King. Some of you here present remember those dark winter days, a score and ten years ago, when the then Prince of Wales had been stricken down by an insidious malady, when it seemed as though the whole nation gathered by the sick-bed in Sandringham. You remember how a sigh of profound relief went forth from the people when his flickering life had been plucked "from half way down the shadow of the grave." There are those among you who remember vividly the enthusiastic acclaim of welcome which greeted him on the day of Thanksgiving, when it is related that the Queen placed her hand lovingly on that of the Prince

and exclaimed, "All this is for you." It may be averred, that, since then, day by day he rooted himself more and more deeply in the affections of the Empire. It was recognised that he sincerely desired the welfare of his people, and laboured unceasingly on their behalf. His gracious courtesy and unvarying tact won him golden opinions, while his tender sympathy for sickness and suffering, his sleepless solicitude for the cause of our hospitals, grappled the nation's heart to his with hooks of steel. To us Jews he became the representative of the Cyrus of old, because of his noble hate of hate, his scorn of scorn, and his absolute freedom from racial and sectarian prejudices, because we believe that at critical moments he has pleaded for justice to the persecuted and mercy to the oppressed.

In common with our fellow subjects we looked forward with gladsome hearts to join in celebrating the stateliest and most solemn of our national ceremonials. Every circumstance

was making for joy and happiness. The dark cloud of war had lifted ; the radiant light of peace was shining upon us. Never before had the Empire stood so great and proud in the eyes of the world. The days of solemn festivity and of majestic pageants worthy of a great nation were drawing nigh. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the cup which was well-nigh at our lips was dashed to the ground. In lieu of the delightsome anticipation, there was profoundest fear ; for overflowing joy there was heart-wringing anxiety. "We had hoped for light but behold clouds, for brightness but we walked in darkness." Almost in the very hour in which the crown of the greatest of modern Empires was to have been placed upon the head of the King, he was stricken down by a grave malady. Those days which were to have been the most joyous in our national annals became some of the saddest. Rarely in history was there a more sudden and more pathetic change from joy to sorrow, from sunshine to shadow. Our hearts

were deeply affected, as we thought of our King bowed down by pain and grieved by his nation's disappointment, as we thought of our Queen and the members of our Royal House bruised by sorrow and anxiety—

Hearts are not steel, and steel is bent;
Hearts are not stone, and stone is rent.

Fitly we may ask, Why should the nation be visited by so tragic a change? Why are we not permitted to tread our path in life smoothly and peacefully? Why are we called upon to endure such a strain, fret, and disappointment? Why should our entrance into the Land of Promise be so oftentimes barred by foemen, that are like unto giants that cannot be overcome, before whom we are as grasshoppers, puny and impotent?

My brethren, the heartening words that Joshua spoke to the children of Israel at that crisis in our history, of which our Sabbath lesson speaks, are also addressed to us: "The Lord is with us; fear them not" (Numbers

xiv. 9). This, dear Congregants, is the thought that should sustain us amid all the troubles and difficulties we have to endure upon earth. This is the one sure prop amid all the changes and chances of our immortal life. That, ignorant, weak, and helpless as we are, ignorant of what may at any moment befall us, there is an all-loving Father, who guides and directs our destinies all the days of our life. He, the essence of infinite wisdom has a beneficent purpose in the trials and afflictions that assail us, in the cares and frets that bow us low. He, the God of infinite compassion, knows our suffering and hears our cry. He has an all-wise end in all the dispensations He brings upon the children of earth. We, with our purblind eyes, cannot always and forthwith discern this purpose. We are like Hagar, who, in her despair, did not perceive the well of water that was close at hand. We are like the ignorant servant of Elisha, to whom the fiery horses and chariots remained invisible, which the Lord had sent

to encompass and protect his master in the valley of Dothan. Oh, that our eyes may be unsealed, and that the conviction of a God-ordered, a God-guided, and God-disciplined life may flash upon us ! Then shall we learn that we cannot hope to enjoy untroubled tranquillity upon earth.

Calm's not life's crown, though calm is sweet.

Our life here on earth is a school, a period of probation. We need trials to discipline us, afflictions to school us. Even as it is only through the obstruction of the prism that the wondrous colours of the sunbeam are discerned, so it is only through the difficulties and adversities, the struggles and conflicts of life, that the higher and nobler qualities of our nature are developed. Nations, as well as individuals, need trials, those unwelcome but salutary teachers. And, recognising this truth, we must look up to God, assured that—

He hath a hand in these events,
To whose high will we bow our low contents.

May we then not believe that the trial which has befallen our nation is a portion of God's great scheme of training? Was there not reason to apprehend that the very enthusiasm and magnificence with which we were about to celebrate the national rejoicing might prove a snare, inducing the boastful, overweening pride, that never had there been so wise and understanding a nation, never so mighty and vast an Empire? But can we not even now discern the purifying and refining influence which the present trial is exercising? It might have been supposed that the sentiment uppermost in the minds of the people would have been bitter disappointment at having been deprived of one of the grandest pageants in history and their attendant rejoicing, or impatience at the serious monetary loss which so many had sustained. But no such petty and sordid sentiments have been voiced. The one o'ermastering thought has been, and is still, grief that he who should have been the pivot and centre of all this pomp and circumstance has been thrown on

the bed of sickness, sympathy for the gracious Lady who is again tending the husband of her youth with devoted solicitude. The crisis has elicited in a striking degree the genuine goodness of heart of the British people, the warmth of feeling that lies stored beneath the seemingly calm and imperturbable exterior, their steadfast and imperishable affection for their Sovereign.

Nothing could have been more impressive than the demeanour of all classes of the population during those saddest of Bank Holidays that have just ended. The crowds were silent ; no signs of merriment were to be seen or heard. All blameworthy accompaniments of cessation from labour were wanting. If an attempt at singing or whistling was made, a few snatches of the National Anthem were heard. But no complaining, no murmuring was heard in our streets about the postponed Coronation.

And, in sooth, was the Coronation postponed ? The material diadem was not placed

on King Edward's head, but in its stead the triple diadem of a nation's renewed homage, redoubled affection, and enhanced admiration. Profound admiration for that resolute will which had prompted him to be ready to endure martyrdom sooner than disappoint his people. Admiration for the pluck and courage evinced in the hour of sorest peril. He is crowned with the prayers of his people. For again they lift up their voice to God, to Him Who has once before redeemed his life from destruction, that He may crown their Sovereign with loving kindness and tender mercies, with renewed health and robust strength. The hopes and aspirations of a united people are concentrated in the one prayerful cry : **לְחיַי הַמֶּלֶךְ** God save the King ! May the King live ! May the King live to rule in the fear of God, in righteousness and in justice, with the hatred of tyrant wrong, with tender sympathy for the oppressed, delivering the needy when he crieth, the poor and sick, and him that hath no helper. God save the King !

AMEN. AMEN.

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